

65 7648

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2005

The President of United States, George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

As members of Congressional Black Caucus we respectfully urge you to grant a posthumous pardon to John Arthur "Jack" Johnson, the first African-American heavyweight-boxing champion. In a gross misapplication of the Mann Act, he was wrongfully prosecuted and convicted in the highly charged racial atmosphere of early 20th century America.

The details of that sad episode in America's racial history were reported recently in Ken Burns' powerful public television documentary entitled *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*. Johnson's historic athletic achievements, independence and courage in the context of the times made him an inspirational figure who gave hope to a population of African Americans living under harshly repressive Jim Crow laws and racial violence.

Johnson, the son of former slaves from Galveston, Texas, won the world heavyweight championship by defeating Tommy Burns in 1908. His victory and disdain for the racial mores of the day enraged his opponents in the press, and eventually led to a campaign to discredit the flamboyant champion who flaunted his wealth and relationships with whites.

In 1913, Johnson was prosecuted under a perverted application of a law meant to curtail organized interstate prostitution. Convicted on the testimony of a rejected former lover, Johnson fled the country. He returned seven years later to serve out his one-year sentence. While on the run, Johnson lost his title to Jess Willard in 1915, and never regained his earlier success. He died in a car accident in 1946 at the age of 68.

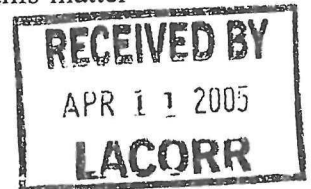
Although he was criticized for his flamboyant lifestyle, Johnson was a hero to African Americans and others across the country who admired his toughness and independence. Self-educated, he refused to bow to limitations imposed by race or myths of racial superiority. In his home state, many Texans recognize Jack Johnson Day on March 31st.

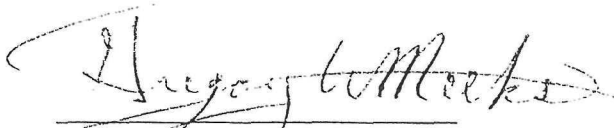
We join with Ken Burns and many of our colleagues in Congress in calling for a posthumous pardon of Jack Johnson, and thank you for your consideration of this matter during Black History Month.


Sincerely,


Charles B. Rangel

 EL 01A
4208
John Conyers

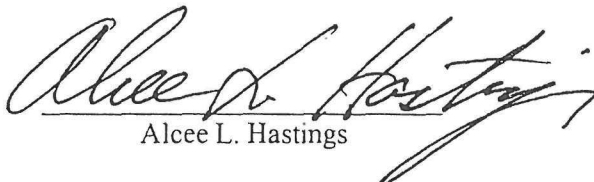


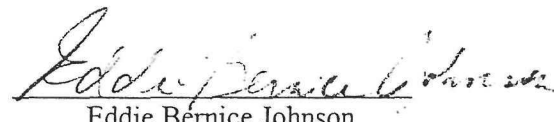

Gregory W. Meeks


Corrine Brown


William Lacy Clay

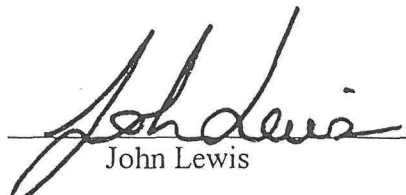

Danny K. Davis

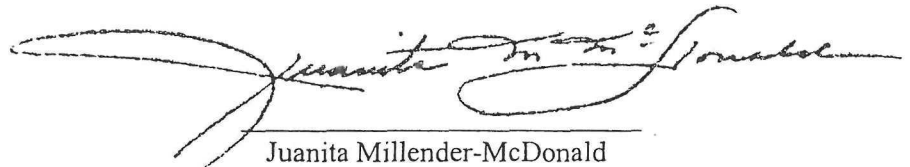

Alcee L. Hastings


Eddie Bernice Johnson

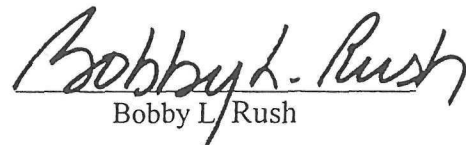

Carolyn Kilpatrick


Barbara Lee

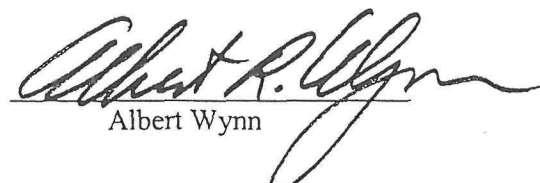

John Lewis


Juanita Millender-McDonald


Major R. Owens


Bobby L. Rush


Edolphus Towns


Albert Wynn